

The Notebook

By Suzan Myhre, MSSW

One of my favorite holidays is Thanksgiving. I think it is because Thanksgiving seems to focus on gratitude and relationships. Every Thanksgiving our house is packed full of family, friends, extended family, and “new” friends we are making. It is a time of connection, sharing, laughing, singing, affection and remembering. It involves all the emotions one can have, and especially for those experiencing loss, there is sorrow, emptiness, and grief.

Several years ago, I wanted to do something in my family that would put the spotlight on our gratitude for each other. As we traveled to Milwaukee to see my mom, I found an empty notebook and decided to take some time out of our evening to reflect on the past year. I invited my husband and children to write down stories about things we saw and were touched by. Each person would write on a page or two, and write about each member of the family. That was in the year 2003, and now I have a notebook full of stories and writings each of my close family members have written about each other. Some of my favorite entries are: “I am thankful my brother puts up with my annoyingness”, “I like that grandma laughs at all my jokes”, “I love your hugs”, “You make me smile”. The notebook is like a treasure of gold to my heart.

One Christmas, my mom, who was 86 years old, began to weep as each of my children, and my husband and I shared with her the sweet memories we had of times growing up and playing in her back yard. We shared with her the qualities about her we loved—her humor, her generosity, her contentment with all things, her steadfastness, her endurance in the face of great pain and her commitment to family—those close and those far away. My mother, Leona, said in a very wobbly voice “I never knew it could be this way”. We were all crying at that point. I think the “this way” was feeling loved, openly giving and receiving love.

God loves us all “this way” every day. He is the giver of all good gifts, and His gift of mercy and forgiveness is for all of us. I encourage you to take some time this Christmas, to receive and to give to those you love a word or gesture of affirmation. I pray you can feel loved and that we call all be “this way”.

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P.O. Box 1676, Appleton, WI 54912 (920) 720-8920

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